



Regional Telecommunications Independent Review

SUBMISSION

Murrumbateman Progress Association Inc.

2015

A Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (the Committee) is established every three years under Part 9B of the *Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999* (the Act) to conduct a review into telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia.

The Terms of Reference for the Committee include:

- consideration of the adequacy of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia, and
- whether people in these areas have equitable access to telecommunications services that are significant to them, and are currently available in one or more parts of urban Australia.

The Committee will also consider the following:

- the impact of infrastructure and service improvements, including what will be delivered by the rollout of the national broadband network (NBN) and the Mobile Black Spot Programme, and
- the relevance going forward of the current universal service obligations, and the associated consumer safeguards and protections that relate to service connection, repair and maintenance.

This is primarily to assess the quality, adequacy and reliability of Australia's communications services in regional, rural and remote areas as compared to cities. Feedback from regional, rural and remote users about their experience regarding the performance, will determine the prevalence of satisfaction and will inform communications providers about the effectiveness of their services and where resources need to be directed for improvement.

The Village of Murrumbateman is unique in that it is located only 22-kilometres from the ACT border. Many Canberra residents retire to Murrumbateman and surrounds for a tree change and more relaxed lifestyle. Australian Government departments in Canberra employ the majority of Murrumbateman's working population. Some refer to Murrumbateman as a suburb of Canberra and to some extent this is true however, the stark difference between Canberra and Murrumbateman is the frustrating third-world quality of information and communications technology (ICT); and the complete absence of services such as education, water, gas, sewer; and in the event of a road accident at night, police are deployed from Goulburn an hour (about 100-kilometers) away. It is notable that despite the regular loss of life on the Barton Highway and more than 12,000 vehicles travelling to and from Canberra each workday, no black spots were funded in or around Murrumbateman. This could be seen as another example of the 'rural' classification equating to 'low priority'.

Background

The Murrumbateman Progress Association (MPA) is a voluntary, not for profit, community-based association operating in the Murrumbateman and its hinterland in New South Wales.

MPA acts as an umbrella organisation to assist community members to conduct their activities with appropriate legal and statutory cover, representative and other support.

History

MPA commenced in 1936 as the Murrumbateman Agricultural Bureau, a branch of the Agricultural Bureau of NSW, which was established in 1910 as an extension of the NSW Department of Agriculture. It was founded to disseminate agricultural information and organize activities in rural areas and provided a link between the Department of Agriculture's extension staff and the agricultural community.

The Bureau went into recess during World War II but was reactivated in 1946 when it amalgamated with the Murrumbateman-Jeir Railway League and Progress Association and the new name became **Murrumbateman Agricultural Bureau and Progress Association (MABPA)**. The objectives of the organization were to:

1. *Promote the take up of rural adult education*
2. *Promote agricultural education*
3. *Promote rural productivity and efficiency, and*
4. *Improve regional and rural standards of living.*

In 1946, Murrumbateman had a population of 280 people, a primary school, post office and no electricity or telephone services. It was the centre for a farming, grazing and wool growing district and agitation from MABPA enabled the construction of a single telephone line to Yass and the provision of electricity. MABPA was also responsible in 1986 for arranging the transfer of the old school building to the Murrumbateman Early Childhood Centre Association (MECCA) when it commenced operating.

Several years ago the NSW Department of Agriculture closed the Agricultural Bureau of NSW State Body and the members of MABPA decided to retain the name of **Murrumbateman Agricultural Bureau and Progress Association Inc. (MABPA)** and operate as an independent organisation.

At the MABPA November General Meeting held on the 21st November 2013, members agreed in principle to accept a revised constitution and voted in support of a name change. The majority of voting members present decided the name would be the **Murrumbateman Progress Association (MPA) Inc.**

Both the new constitution and the new name were lodged with the NSW Department of Fair Trading for official recognition before they could officially be adopted. The name and new Constitution were accepted without amendment in January 2014.

OUR VISION

A vibrant and sustainable Murrumbateman and region community.

OUR VALUES

Bettering our Murrumbateman region community by demonstrating:

- integrity
- inclusivity
- transparency
- stewardship and
- leaving a just legacy
- sharing our commitment to the environment
- sustainability, and
- community-based activities.

Today, Murrumbateman has a population of around 4,150 and Yass Valley Council projections show the population will more than double in the next five to six years. Murrumbateman has been identified by the NSW Government as one of the fastest growing areas in the state due to the number of building blocks coming on to the market. While many residents work in Canberra, many also work from home and therefore are dependent on ICT services to interact with their clients.

MPA's income comes from membership fees, mower contributions from Yass Valley Council's Recreation Grounds Committee, the Pony Club and Adult Riders Club; and funds generated by the Murrumbateman Field Days, which is held annually. MPA organizes about 1,000 volunteers over the Field Days weekend and funds are distributed to local and regional community groups as grants.

The total amount of funding since 1993 is more than \$550,000 and these funds have been paid to 28 different community organizations. The main recipient has been the Murrumbateman Recreation Reserve Grounds, which has received \$286,039 to date. MPA generates a small amount from membership. The improvements paid for by MPA include bitumen and other road works, signage, a sand arena, horse yards, weather shed, BBQ shed (now the Menshed), Recreation Hall improvements and commercial kitchen; and the tennis courts facility.

Last year in October, during the Murrumbateman Field Days, we experienced a catastrophic failure in telecommunications. The more than 400 exhibitors on site were denied telecommunications services, which meant that EFT payments could not be processed electronically. Hundreds of visitors turned away as we were unable to process ticket sales resulting in only 20,000 attendees. The auto-teller machines worked for about an hour before they failed. There was no mobile service across the site - even the 000 emergency number was unavailable. This catastrophe cost MPA dearly to the point where we barely broke even and therefore few community groups and no projects could be supported this year. Should this occur again we would be seeking a legal remedy.

In response to the catastrophic outage and MPA persistently voicing its concerns, Telstra upgraded the Euroka Avenue tower to 4G. Advice from Telstra's Radio Engineer (via Urbis) stated the recent 4G upgrade and addition of more capacity to the facility at Euroka Ave will resolve the capacity issues at the Murrumbateman Field Days this year. Urbis went on to say that "Telstra is monitoring the progress of the site and will act on capacity issues *should they arise again* in future." They inform us the additional bandwidth will be adequate for the Field Days event. While they appear positive, they have expressed a degree of uncertainty i.e. "should they [the issues and outages] arise again in future." This is very disconcerting given the catastrophic failure (denial of service) we experienced last year.

We have been liaising with Telstra since January and on 25 June 2015 we sought assurances via our Federal Member of Parliament, Angus Taylor MP that this cataclysmic outage would not occur again in 2015. We await a reply.

Currently on another important issue, the Field Days office has no telephone or fax services – this is a very busy time for us as we are processing more than four hundred exhibitor site allocations and trying to bank deposits.

Telstra arranged a team of contract cable installers but they are limited to cable installations only and another contract team will physically join the cables. Now, we await the arrival of a team of cable joiners to complete the repairs and finally re-establish ICT services after enduring denial of service for about two months. Imagine running a business in this environment. As a result, our Field Days manager and administrative staff have been using their personal cell phones in order to communicate with media, clients and exhibitors.

At time of writing, we have not been advised of the scheduled date for this critical completion of the job.

From our point of view, hosting a major annual event given the consistently poor service negatively impacts our credibility and our ability to conduct our business in a professional way. Murrumbateman residents, local businesses and community groups are seriously disadvantaged. Telstra's dismissive attitude towards the residents of Murrumbateman (which Telstra considers 'rural' and therefore 'low priority') is unacceptable in 2015 given Telstra's excessively high fee structure compared to the high quality services enjoyed by our neighbours in the national capital, only 22-kilometres away.

The MPA survey

The MPA Executive on hearing about the triennial survey of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote areas; quickly mobilized and designed a survey which was circulated to our members and non-member residents via the MPA website, Facebook and Twitter.

Our thanks go to Sandy McClintock for designing the survey and to Clair Du Pont for preliminary data analysis.

The MPA telecommunications survey is designed to provide as much current and relevant information from ICT users in the Murrumbateman and surrounding area. We have encouraged respondents to provide their personal ICT experiences.

Results of the survey

Altogether there were 44 entries for the Murrumbateman Communications Survey 2015. Because of the high interest shown we will keep the survey open to gather more data until the end of July 2015.

Internet, Landline & Mobile Satisfaction

Table 1: Internet Satisfaction

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Blank /NA	Total
Overall Satisfaction	5	15	9	15	0	0	44
Reliability	5	14	12	11	1	1	44
Service from internet Provider	4	5	15	18	1	1	44
Speed	17	22	3	2	0	0	44
Quality	9	13	11	9	0	2	44
Choice of Providers	8	5	18	11	2	0	44

Table 2: Landline Satisfaction

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Blank /NA	Total
Overall Satisfaction	5	2	11	17	1	8	44
Reliability	4	1	7	21	3	8	44
Service from internet Provider	5	2	12	14	0	11	44

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Blank /NA	Total
Line Quality	1	5	10	16	4	8	44
Choice of Providers	2	4	9	14	7	8	44

Table 3: Mobile Satisfaction

	Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Blank /NA	Total
Overall Satisfaction	0	9	9	21	5	0	44
Reliability	1	10	11	17	5	0	44
Service from internet Provider	2	4	11	21	4	2	44
Speed	3	14	7	10	0	10	44
Quality	2	9	12	17	4	0	44
Reception	4	15	9	15	1	0	44
Choice of Providers	2	6	11	18	4	3	44

Telecommunications Failure during Emergency or Accident

Q4. Has there ever been an emergency or accident when you needed telecommunications services and it failed?

In reply to this question 3 people replied YES and 41 people replied NO.

Problems with Telecommunications

Q5. Please describe a recent time (date if possible) when your communications service let you down and how that affected you and your family

The following 17 people made the following comments in regards to this question:

1. Mobile reception so poor that landline had to be use in animal related emergency meaning people having to relay messages to person on landline speaking to vet
2. In January my wife fell and broke her leg. The landline had broken down (again!) and the mobile signal was so poor I had to leave my wife in the house and go outside and up a hill to phone the ambulance.
3. I constantly have dropouts on my ADSL line and the Internet connects and disconnects constantly due to the constant noise on the line.
4. We regularly loose our ADSL Internet, which is of considerable annoyance when either my husband or myself are trying to do some work from home
5. We have unplugged our home phone as we have significant difficulties all of the time in receiving calls, hearing calls. We have had numerous visits from Telstra overt the 13 years to no avail - the infrastructure/exchange is not up to servicing our area despite living 45 minutes from the national capital.
6. Our communications drops out several times a day.
7. Land line phone was out of service 4 times in the last year, each time for around a month-relying on mobiles, children needing to be contacted at home who don't have mobiles-difficult. Internet is expensive and slow. Broadband is not available here. There is no competition with Internet providers-Telstra is the only one who services us here. \$85 a month for 8g is not competitive or reasonable. Students in high school are expected to do homework on line, research on line. This gets very difficult.
8. Very slow Internet on various nights leads to frustration when pages cannot be accessed.
9. I work from home and my IT connection sometimes cuts out. This can sometimes be in heavy rain, but not always. It's intermittent, so I don't have a date. This affects my ability to telecommute and earn income.
10. Internet is down reliably at least 5 days a week - duration various from an hour to 12 hours
11. 29th June - 3rd July 2015 - 3G network kept dropping out (this is a regular occurrence) impacting my children being able to complete school assignments for which they needed internet access.
12. Within the last six months the landline service has failed, which has happened around twice a year for the last 10 years. Because of the copper lines I can only use wireless broadband for the Internet and the average signal strength is one bar out of four ie very weak signals.
13. "3G service is very poor, even with external antenna directed towards at Euroka Ave tower. Unable to get line of sight. Streaming media such as Netflix or Foxtel is impossible. I run a small technology business, which is impacted by the poor broadband services in my area. The local telephone exchange is not internet/dslam enabled. I have no alternatives beyond 3/4G."

14. "October 18th 19th 2014. Telstra mobile network failed due to spike in load caused by field days. Could not use mobile service. 2013 to ongoing NBN satellite service below promised speeds and service. Frustrating not being able use the Internet for even basic things such as email.
15. At home recently I lost all Internet/WiFi connections and as I work from home these connections are crucial. I also work with two local community groups who have their offices at the Recreation Grounds. They have had no phone or Internet service for months and both their major events are coming up!!!
16. This morning there was an outage that lasted about four hours resulting in no email and Internet. I was unable to respond to important emails.
17. Working from home and the Internet service was so slow I had to go to the office to complete my day. Means extra trap time and less time at home with family

Business Communications Barriers

What communications barriers have you experienced in expanding or operating your business or providing services? Have you been able to overcome these barriers and if so, how?

In response to this question, the following 21 of respondents made the following comments:

1. Slow Internet means I cannot offer a server service from home.
2. I have been unable to use any online services for my business. Web site access and email access are too unreliable to be of any use.
3. None so far.
4. On only a few occasions we have resorted to visiting customers when the service was down.
5. Internet speeds are slow or the services drop out.
6. Very slow or unusable Internet services.
7. Bandwidth and latency are of primary concern. My business requires a fast, high capacity Internet connection. Wireless doesn't cut it. I am currently unable to overcome this deficiency and have to make use of remote servers. This limits my capacity to expand my business.
8. We cannot rely on our home phone for emergency calls as there is little chance that the receiver will be able to hear us and vice versa; indeed even

on calls to Telstra for faults, they have said it 'if very hard to hear you, can you speak up!'

9. Due to the Internet dropping out several times a day this adds approximately 1 - 2 hours to my time being able to complete work. On several occasions when I know I have a significant amount of work to get through and I cant afford to be waiting for pages to load etc etc, I travel into town to find a cafe to use their WiFi access.
10. No business.
11. Difficult for our two uni-students to transmit large documents.
12. The reliability and connection speed is not as good as in the ACT. This affects my ability to work from home and telecommute. I am reticent to download really large files, as I am concerned at my down load speeds and service reliability.
13. Sourcing useful and reliable Internet access. The current infrastructure is a monopoly and service providers other than Telstra depend on Telstra "copper". As an IT business, this is causing huge impositions to growth; if not viability.
14. Slow Internet makes using online services slow and frustrating. Patchy mobile results in little use of it.
15. Lack of bandwidth/speed for Internet connection.
16. I am forced to use the system as it is; I cannot do any better.
17. I run a small technology services company that relies on good Internet services. It is not an issue of reliability, rather performance and cost. 3G services are an order of magnitude more expensive than ADSL services. Download limits and performance impact my small businesses ability to become efficient and cost effective growth in delivery of online services.
18. As a PR/Marketing consultant and contractor, my reliance on good, reliable telecommunications services are crucial. I cannot expand my business and in fact often have difficulty in providing existing services from home and from the community group offices for the contracts I have.
19. Internet too slow to be able to work effectively from home. The fix was to set up office in Canberra.
20. Very slow Internet.
21. Outages in business hours are a problem as is very slow upload and download speeds.

NBN

Q1. When the NBN becomes available in your area, will you get it?

Yes	32 (73%)
No	0 (0%)
Unsure	5 (11%)
Will decide at the time	6 (14%)
Will decide at the time / Unsure	1 (3%)
Total	44

Q2. How important is the NBN to you and your family / or business?

Extremely Important	20 (46%)
Very Important	10 (23%)
Important	11 (25%)
Not Very Important	2 (6%)
Don't Care	1 (3%)
Total	44

Q3. How do you see the Internet or NBN affecting your business within the next 2 - 5 years, and what Internet connection speeds do you envisage that you will need to remain competitive? Please provide specific examples of what you would do with faster, more reliable Internet.

In response to this question, 16 people made the following comments:

1. Easier to remotely manage servers e.g. at Murrumbateman Field Days.
2. With reliable Internet I could actually stream a movie rather than waiting 14 hours for it to download for one thing. From a business perspective, having reliable Internet would allow me to interface with my clients and allow them

access to the information I create for them. I have to physically give it to them on USB key as downloading fails too frequently to be useable.

3. My small business will be promoted largely through my web site. A lot of the content will be videos, which need fast, reliable Internet.
4. It will simply make life a little easier. Most of our work is outside and so our access is for accounts, etc.
5. I don't run a business from home but do undertake volunteer work.
6. My business uses its own server with a static IP address to provide services to clients. The limiting factor is the upload speed of the connection (i.e. the download speed of clients that connect to my server). A fast, reliable Internet connection will enable me to provide more extensive services to my clients, eg. Code repositories, issue tracking, marketing, downloads, etc. It will also allow me to better interact with my clients, eg. Video-conferencing. To be competitive I would require an Internet connection speed of 50-100 Mbps.
7. It will give me approximately 1-2 hours per day that is currently wasted in waiting for pages to load, re-connecting printers when the internet drops out and general faster load.
8. I am hoping for greater reliability and an increase in speed. I am hoping faster than 12Mbps... 50-100Mbps would be better. With greater speeds I could then do real time design remotely and participate in more meetings via video links. Uploading and downloading large files (350mb+) would be more feasible. I would then be more likely to work in the 'cloud' more often in real time, rather than work offline and then connect to upload.
9. Core requirement. Cloud services are becoming dominant and hence high speed Internet is mandatory. As well, not viable as a business if comprehensive remote management functions are not available - and fast Internet mandates.
10. A faster internet speed would save many hours of using online services which are an important part of doing business these days.
11. We often work from home which requires broadband internet and the kids require internet for school study and assignment research, the only internet access we can get is via 3G, unfortunately this frequently drops out or reverts to GPRS and thus significantly degrades our ability to access the internet, it is also very limited in capacity and very expensive compared to those in Canberra who can get home cable broadband.
12. I see the NBN broadband Internet as the catalyst to enabling high-speed collaboration and software development efficiencies leading to business growth and technological advancements. My business would be able to deliver advanced and real-time data to customers globally.
13. Expand business and both my PR contract events, the cool climate wine show and the local field days will be able to operate with suitable connections. The current situation is severely affecting both events ability to hold successful events and attract visitors to the local area.

14. Will enable me to expand business to include online shopping. I would like 50Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload as a minimum to be able to expand but will be happy with any increase on the current speeds.
15. Hopefully faster.
16. I require a smart service that is very fast, reliable and affordable. I don't appreciate staring at the screen waiting for things to happen.

Mobile Blackspots

Q1. Do you know of any mobile blackspots in Murrumbateman? If so, please list in the text box below, including cross roads (if relevant), landmarks, and whether or not you know if it is service provider related (eg you have access, but a colleague using a different carrier doesn't).

Murrumbateman residents made the following 17 comments in regards to mobile black spots in the area.

1. Sometimes I have to go outside the house to get reception
2. Barton Highway near Capricorn Park in the Township. The Country Inn has next to no reception.
3. I loose service in my house but that isn't a blacks postcard it isn't consistent.
4. Yes, Jeir near Capricorn park. Also we can only get Telstra service in our house, as Optus is too unreliable.
5. Mobile drops out at least 3 times between Euroka Avenue and Hall, along the Barton Highway.
6. Kaveney's road near dog trap.
7. Lakeview Drive.
8. Kaveney's road in parts inside the house, near shed, in parts of paddocks but variable.
9. The Barton highway from Hall to Murrumbateman has multiple black spots. I think this is dangerous. There are a few black spots around Merryville Estate, especially in the lower areas. Telstra seems to have better coverage than Optus.
10. Overall, weak signal all through Murrumbateman area - and I am on a Telstra Business mobile, not a consumer one. Using the Murrumbateman road route to travel to and from Canberra, there are many places where service drops out or is marginal.
11. Patchy service along many parts of Murrumbateman Road including Bush's Lane, Nanima Road, etc.

12. Certain sections of Kaveney's Road.
13. Glencoe Road, parts of Murrumbateman Road.
14. Parts of my property have poor or no reception. Keirs Road. Most of Hillview Drive. Murrumbateman especially when there are events on e.g. Field Days.
15. Generally gullies and low-lying areas.
16. Many Jiparu residents complain of black spots.
17. Yass River Road. See mobile black spot funding map.
18. I have some mobile reception here (one bar) so I can't take the chance of disconnecting the landline. Have also had difficulty with reception from the recreation grounds and from the hotel.
19. Corner of woods close and Isabel Drive.
20. On Barton heading to Murrumbateman after Capricorn at the overtaking lane.
21. Just after Gooda Creek heading to Murrumbateman.
22. At Hall.
23. Ambleside estate.
24. Hall Place.

Q2. Have you ever experienced an emergency or accident where you were located in a mobile blackspot area in Murrumbateman and were therefore unable to contact relevant emergency services?

Yes	2 (5%)
No	34 (77%)
Blank	8 (18%)

Please explain further

The following 4 comments were made in response to question 2.

1. During Field Days on the third weekend in October the mobile network had been saturated. We are hoping that a recent upgrade to the Euroka Avenue tower will facilitate communications this year.
2. In a fire, power and mobile phones both fail. In severe fires landlines fail especially at plastic junction boxes in roadside high trash areas.

3. Not yet, but it worries me when I'm out in a field, especially if I was to be bitten by a snake.
4. Using mobile involves finding a spot in house or paddock with reasonable reception. Often varies.

TV & Radio Reception

Q1. Do you have TV reception?

Q2. Do you have radio reception?

Q3. Do you have any issues with reception during bad weather, storms etc...?

	Yes	No
Television Reception	44 (100%)	0 (0%)
Radio Reception	42 (96%)	2 (4%)
Issues with Reception	29 (67%)	15 (33%)

If you do have issues with reception during bad weather, storms, please give details.

In response to this question, 28 people made the following comments:

1. Electric fences totally kill Free-to-air TV and Radio.
2. Storms seem to affect reception of the digital signal - often get 'No Signal' during bad weather.
3. We have ongoing issues with both TV and radio reception. Buzzing and hissing for no particular reasons.
4. During storms we sometimes loose signal from Prime and Win. ABC and SBS seem to be the more stable, but it depends on where the storm is.
5. Hardly any TV reception when bad weather (storms, strong winds). In particular Prime is bad.
6. Digital radio reception can be very spasmodic. Drops in and out for no reason.

7. Digital picture quality is extremely unreliable when weather affected. This is applicable during the summer dry months as well as bad weather throughout the year.
8. Thunderstorms interfere with Foxtel satellite service, as well as digital television.
9. Signal to TV can pause; it takes a few seconds to recommence.
10. Always have bad reception in storms.
11. Wind and storms affect special aerial and sat dishes.
12. TV - we just tried to buy a top of the range new HD TV recorder. Installed it and it wouldn't work. Back to Fyshwick, replaced it because we thought the unit may have been faulty. It also didn't work. Had to get a technician out. He said we had a weak signal and had to get a signal booster (not cheap and we already have a top of the range antennae). In the end after trying various units we have had to go for the simplest unit available, hardly any features. It works. The better quality ones don't work with our poor signal. It only has to rain and it interferes with signal quality - you can see the pixel interference. Sometimes it is so poor we give up and watch a DVD. Radio - Can't get my favourite radio station (91.9); but I can in the car... except in fog, low cloud or rain. When I try and listen to other radio stations (e.g. Classic FM) the quality is hugely affected by fog, low cloud or rain. Sometimes I switch it off because it is so poor."
13. From pixilation to complete loss of TV reception during storms or high winds.
14. TV reception bad or occasionally nil at times in bad weather. No digital radio, FM reception poor, AM requires a good quality radio receiver.
15. Poor quality reception and or channels drop out, both TV And radio
16. Can't receive SBS at times (seemingly random) through the normal TV but OK through a computer. Storms often cause disruption to other stations.
17. Especially during storms and overcast days Channel 7 is especially poor.
18. SBS and channel 7 in poor weather. Generally good during fine weather.
19. Digital radio inconsistent, otherwise AM and FM not too bad.
20. When the weather is very hot, it causes digital dropouts on prime7.
21. I have Foxtel through a satellite dish and often reception cuts out during bad weather.
22. We lose TV signals during storms.
23. During storms, or even heavy rain, our digital service is interrupted, and sometimes lost for the duration. We are unable to receive any of the Channel 7 stations at all, Channel 10 in one part of the house only, ABC intermittently".
24. Sometimes lose TV reception.
25. We lose channel 10 often and ABC regularly, occasionally 7 is also affected.

26. Disruptive.
27. The reception is poor and the signal frequently drops out in bad weather.
28. Free to air TV is very unstable in this area. Electric fences cause interference, as do winds from particular directions and thunderstorms.

Regional v Urban areas reliance on telecommunications

Do you believe your reliance on telecommunications in Murrumbateman (regional area) differs from those in urban areas?

In response to this question, 24 (55%) people replied YES while 20 (46%) of respondents replied NO.

How does it differ and can you provide examples?

In response to this question, the following 24 comments were made.

1. The tyranny of distance dictates that it is better and cheaper to use online services rather than try to use public transport
2. The strength of our phone signal varies, depending on where we are in the house and where we are on the property.
3. There have been a number of outages over the last six months all explained as upgrades.
4. You are further away from neighbours so if there is an emergency you can't necessarily depend on them. Telecommunications aren't also a priority out in the country like in the cities / urban areas. And there aren't as many options to choose from, sometimes only Telstra
5. I'm a chronic asthmatic and one of the issues that we had to consider when moving out from Canberra was the distance to emergency medical facilities.
6. Because of the distance between us and neighbours/shops/emergency services etc.
7. "We have an unusable home phone line we have slow, very slow, Internet connection".
8. You cannot run next door if you need help, emergency wise. Neighbours are too far away. You need to be able to phone, particularly in a natural disaster/fire situation.

9. "Rural properties are further away from help if needed. You cannot just call out to a neighbour- they are too far away. Also, by its very nature, rural properties are further away from supports such as doctors, hospitals etc.
10. Poorer mobile coverage and slower landline Internet speeds, lines very exposed to weather events and lightening 7 years 4 plus modems and several more filters. Rain equals noisy landlines.
11. Distance from services. Often sole provider services entire area. Hence if Telco services are down, then no likelihood of a neighbour having an alternate?
12. "Property sizes are significantly larger, meaning I do not work alone without my mobile in my pocket. Not financially viable to bring the phone landline connection to the house from the street due to size of property."
13. Patchy mobile reception, slow Internet, no digital radio, poor FM reception.
14. The remoteness of where I live despite being 30 minutes away from the ACT means that the Telstra service is critical.
15. Need to access Centrelink, Medicare, banking & other services due to travel times for face to face or shop front access.
16. I live on a rural property and don't have a person next door - I have to travel kilometres to my neighbour if my phones are not working - i.e. power outage for landlines.
17. No NBN, No ADSL services in my area.
18. Being in a rural area we rely more on telecommunications than those in urban areas. For example see above.
19. "Less attention is paid to fewer customers in our area. The landline has failed at least 8 times in the past 12 months. Despite being a business line (Supposed to be repaired in a 24 to 48 hour period), we often have to wait more than a week. Diversion to the mobile is offered but we are in a marginal area for mobile signals. In the emergency experienced in January, we were not able to rely on neighbours as they are too far away."
20. We run a small business and rely on Internet. We do not have NBN or even ADSL 2. We moved from Gungahlin where both are readily available. Mobile phone signal is also patchy.
21. We live so far away.
22. Only ADSL wireless Internet.
23. We do not have the luxury of multiple providers and must rely on one or two key Telco's. We are at their mercy. Telecoms is essential where we live due to the complexities of semi rural living, accident, snake bite, bush fires are some examples of life threatening issues that all rely on access to reliable and affordable telecom provision.

24. I lived in Canberra for 38 years where ICT services are good. Coming to live in Murrumbateman is like going back in time - about 100 years. Even Nigeria has better ICT services.

Preliminary Conclusions

The survey provides a range of quantitative and qualitative information.

Essentially, the major issue is the slow speed of Internet services. There is a general satisfaction with landline services; and mobile services although some respondents raise the issue of line quality. Three respondents report they have experienced denial of service outages during an emergency and therefore were unable to get help. 73% report they will get the NBN while 46% say it is important to their families. 100% of respondents say they have TV reception while 96% report they have radio reception, Of these, 67% report reception issues particularly in bad weather. 55% of respondents say they have poorer services in Murrumbateman than in urban areas.

When all data is accounted for, a final report will be prepared.

Margaret Head

President